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BC FERRIES HARMONIZES SAFETY PRACTICES WITH CANADIAN FERRY OPERATORS

VICTORIA – On October 11, 2017, BC Ferries will harmonize its safety practices with Canadian ferry operators relating to Transport Canada regulations that prohibit passengers from remaining in their vehicle on any closed deck on a vessel that is underway.

Since 2007, BC Ferries has been complying with Transport Canada regulations by maintaining a continuous car deck patrol. BC Ferries and Transport Canada recently re-examined the policy and in an effort to coordinate safety practices will change the application of the regulation.

On larger vessels with both an upper and lower vehicle deck, customers will still be able to remain in their vehicles on the upper vehicle deck. Customers with special circumstances may make a request at the ticket booth to be placed on the upper vehicle deck. Where this is possible, BC Ferries will try and accommodate your request.

“The regulations relate to safety, and the safety of our passengers and employees is a core value for BC Ferries,” said Captain Jamie Marshall, BC Ferries’ Vice President of Fleet Operations. “Last year we carried 21 million passengers safely to their destinations by keeping safety top-of-mind in every operational decision we made.”

This new policy applies to the lower vehicle decks on the following vessels:

- Spirit of British Columbia
- Spirit of Vancouver Island
- Coastal Renaissance
- Coastal Inspiration
- Coastal Celebration
- Queen of Alberni
- Queen of Coquitlam
- Queen of Cowichan
- Queen of New Westminster
- Queen of Oak Bay
- Queen of Surrey
- Queen of Nanaimo
- Salish Orca
- Salish Eagle
- Salish Raven
- Northern Expedition
- Northern Adventure
- New vessel servicing Port Hardy – Bella Coola

These vessels generally operate on the Tsawwassen – Swartz Bay, Tsawwassen – Duke Point, Horseshoe Bay – Departure Bay, Horseshoe Bay – Langdale, Powell River – Comox, Tsawwassen –

Southern Gulf Islands, Port Hardy – Prince Rupert and Prince Rupert – Haida Gwaii routes. The policy also applies to the vessel that will operate the Port Hardy – Bella Coola route.

BC Ferries staff will initially adopt a soft approach to enforcement by informing customers of the Transport Canada regulation and asking them to comply. BC Ferries appreciates there may be a small number of customers who request an exemption to the regulation. Exemptions to the regulations cannot be routinely granted, but employees will do their best to accommodate customers who have unique challenges or special needs that may preclude exiting their vehicle and moving up to the passenger decks.

A closed vehicle deck is a space that is closed at both ends with limited side openings. Access restrictions to closed vehicle decks will not apply when passengers are directed by announcement to return to their vehicles before the vessel docks.

The regulation in question is Section 152 of the Cargo, Tackle and Fumigation Regulations under the Canada Shipping Act. For more information, visit tc.gc.ca.

– 30 –

Frequently Asked Questions below.

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. Why does BC Ferries have to comply now after the regulation has been around since 2007?

Since 2007, BC Ferries has maintained a continuous car deck patrol. BC Ferries and Transport Canada recently re-examined the policy and in an effort to coordinate safety practices will change the application of the regulation.

2. Which vessels do the regulations apply to?

The new regulation applies to the following vessels: Spirit of British Columbia, Spirit of Vancouver Island, Coastal Renaissance, Coastal Inspiration, Coastal Celebration, Queen of Alberni, Queen of Coquitlam, Queen of Cowichan, Queen of New Westminster, Queen of Oak Bay, Queen of Surrey, Queen of Nanaimo, Salish Orca, Salish Eagle, Salish Raven, Northern Expedition, Northern Adventure and the new vessel servicing Port Hardy – Bella Coola.

3. Why are customers allowed on the upper vehicle deck?

Transport Canada's regulation only applies to enclosed vehicle decks. The upper vehicle deck is open to the external environment and is not affected by the regulations.

4. Are any vehicles exempt?

The vehicles that are not required to comply with the regulations are vehicles that due to the nature of their operation require their operators to be present, including but not limited to: ambulances, other emergency vehicles and livestock carriers.

5. How can I request/book/reserve to be on the upper vehicle deck?

Customers with special circumstances can request to be on the upper vehicle deck by letting the ticket agent know when they arrive at the terminal that they prefer to be on the upper car deck. Where this is possible, BC Ferries will try and accommodate your request. For vehicles that arrive close to the time of boarding or once boarding has commenced, it may not be possible to accommodate the request. The final decision to load a vehicle on the upper or lower car deck rests with the Loading Officer who is responsible for the safe stowage of all vehicles/cargo.

6. What qualifies as a special circumstance to request being on the upper vehicle deck?

Customers with special circumstances such as medical difficulties, challenges or special needs that may preclude them exiting their vehicle may make a request to be on the upper vehicle deck by letting the ticket agent know when they arrive at the terminal. Where this is possible, BC Ferries will try and accommodate your request.

7. If I have a pet, can I request the upper vehicle deck?

Customers can request to be on the upper vehicle deck by letting the ticket agent know when they arrive at the terminal that they prefer to be on the upper vehicle deck. Where this is possible, BC Ferries will try and accommodate the request. Where this is not possible, passengers with pets can use the pet areas located on the upper (open) vehicle decks. Pets will be allowed to remain in vehicles on the lower vehicle deck, but their owners are requested to leave the lower car deck.

8. What happens if passengers refuse to leave their vehicles?

Transport Canada institutes these regulations for the safety of passengers, and passenger safety is of paramount importance to BC Ferries. We hope that the benefits become self-evident and customers will choose to leave the closed vehicle deck. The small number of customers that remain on the closed vehicle deck will be asked to leave their vehicles.

9. On shorter trips, why do passengers need to go to the upper passenger deck?

Transport Canada's regulations apply to all vessels and trips regardless of their duration.